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ABSTRACT

Ribault (Florida) Senior High School has reported a dramatic increase in student achievement levels since implementing a comprehensive college preparation curriculum. Among the program changes that contributed to those gains are: (1) the establishment and consistent enforcement of a strong discipline program, including rules for student conduct, a dress code, and strict attendance policies; (2) schoolwide promotion of academic excellence based on high standards and expectations for student achievement; (3) assessment of student strengths and weaknesses and refocusing instruction to teach skills needed to increase performance; and (4) strong commitment from teachers, principals, and superintendents to help students achieve. Prior to implementing these changes in 1977, only 56 percent of Ribault students were able to show minimum competence in communications to pass that portion of the State Student Assessment Test (SSAT), and only 20 percent passed in mathematics. In 1981, after implementing the above changes, 84 percent of Ribault students were able to pass the communications portion of the SSAT, and 86 percent demonstrated minimum competence in mathematics. (LH)

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STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS CLIMB AT RIBAULT SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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Goal Based Education Program
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Profiles
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Program Profile

Student Achievement Levels Climb at Ribault Senior High School

Student achievement levels have dramatically increased since 1977 at Ribault Senior High School in Jacksonville, Florida. A comprehensive high school with a college preparatory curriculum, Ribault is an urban school with a student population of approximately 1,500, all but a few of whom are black. There is 58 percent participation in the school's free or reduced-price lunch program, and 60 percent of students are from low income families.

There have been significant changes in Ribault student achievement levels both on nationally normed standardized achievement tests and on the Florida statewide basic skills test introduced in 1977 in compliance with the state's Educational Accountability Act.

The Florida State Student Assessment Test (SSAT) measures student performance in the basic skills areas of mathematics and communications (reading and writing). The SSAT is given annually to all Florida high school students, to grade 11 students until 1981 and now to grade 10 students.

The SSAT was first administered to Ribault's eleventh grade class in 1977. Only 56 percent of Ribault students were able to show minimum competence in communications to pass that portion of the test, and only 20 percent passed in mathematics. By 1981, 84 percent of Ribault students passed the communications portion of the SSAT, and a dramatic 86 percent demonstrated minimum competence in mathematics.

A similar trend has been shown in student scores on the Stanford Achievement Test, administered each spring to Ribault students in grades 10, 11 and 12. Median scores for grade 12 students climbed from 20.6 in 1977 to 35.6 in 1981.

A number of program changes at the school contributed to these gains in student achievement, including:

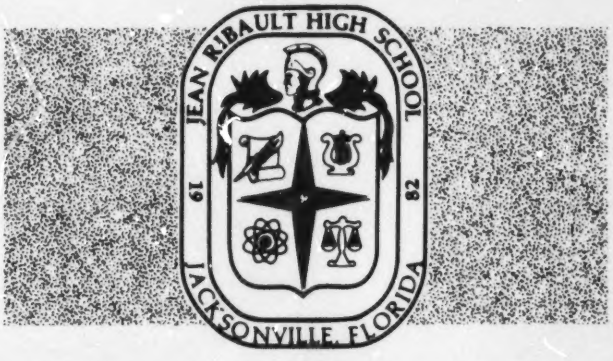
- The establishment and consistent enforcement of a strong program of discipline, including rules for student conduct, a dress code and strict attendance policies
- Schoolwide promotion of academic excellence, based on high standards and expectations for student achievement
- Assessment of student strengths and weaknesses and refocusing instruction to teach skills needed to increase performance
- Strong commitment from teachers, principal and superintendent to help students achieve.

Discipline First Step at Ribault

In the mid 1970s, Ribault suffered the problems of many large urban high schools: declining enrollment, student absenteeism and low student achievement levels. Prompted by low student scores on the Florida State Student Assessment Test in 1977, Duval County School Superintendent Herb A. Sang grew concerned about Ribault and began efforts to turn the school around.

Sang replaced the school principal in 1977 and declared that Ribault would be a district "pilot" school, the subject of a comprehensive school improvement effort. The superintendent then met with parents, students and community leaders to discuss the new focus for Ribault and to enlist cooperation from the entire school community.

Incoming principal Walter Harris first moved to reduce student absences from classes and to improve the general climate at Ribault. He instituted new policies and procedures to control student behaviors. Students were required to be in class on time. A school-wide dress code was introduced and enforced. Smoking was banned on the campus, and bathrooms were checked regularly to see that students were not loitering or smoking there. The school parking lot was restricted to students only, non-student traffic was eliminated and the lot was monitored for trespassers and vagrant students. Students who would not comply with new policies were expelled from school.



Student achievement at Ribault Senior High School has increased dramatically since 1977.

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Teachers, too, were required to adopt new procedures. Teachers were themselves encouraged to honor the dress code and to complete paperwork for classes and administrative requirements promptly.

In an unusual move, the principal announced to teachers at the end of the 1977-78 school year that they were not to assume that they would be returning to the school the following fall. All Ribault teachers were required to reapply for their positions at the school or to apply for transfers to other schools in the district.

As a result, two-thirds of the teaching staff at Ribault were new to the school in the 1978-79 school year. Staff attitudes were drastically different: teachers were at Ribault because they had chosen the school and were committed to its students.

Excellence Promoted for all Students

The next step toward increasing student achievement was a concerted effort by the superintendent, principal and teachers to promote the idea that all students should strive for academic excellence. This action was based on a philosophical position that all students are capable of meeting standards and would be expected to do so.

Ribault had historically been highly successful in athletics, so administrators decided to instill in students a competitive spirit in academics comparable to attitudes about sports. This approach was to center around the 1978-79 Florida State Student Assessment Tests. There were pep rallies for the juniors who would be tested that year. The school band played, cheerleaders performed and large posters were made for decorating the auditorium during the rallies. Students were urged to do as well as possible on the test: good scores on the tests would be an important source of school pride. Students began to develop interest in representing the school through the test.

At the same time, teachers were working to adjust the instructional program so that students would be better prepared for the SSAT. First-year results from the 1977-78 tests were analyzed to discover Ribault students strengths and where work was needed to improve scores. Analysis showed that the worst student performance had been in the mathematics portion of the SSAT the previous year, so teachers concentrated most effort on helping students with their math, the area of greatest need.

SSAT OBJECTIVES

Communication—Reading Standards

A. Acquire a basic vocabulary
B. Determine word meaning from usage in passage
C. Determine word meaning from word parts
E. Determine the main idea of a message
F. Find information in a message
H. Determine the generalization supported by a message
I. Identify fantasy, fact, and opinion
J. Recognize irrelevant and invalid statements
K. Follow oral and written directions
M. Use appropriate reference skills

Communication—Writing Standards

B. Organize information
G. Spell correctly
H. Punctuate correctly
I. Capitalize correctly

Mathematics Standards

C. Round numbers
D. Put numbers in order
E. Identify equivalent fractions, decimals, and percents
H. Multiply whole numbers
I. Divide whole numbers
J. Add and subtract fractions
K. Multiply fractions
M. Multiply and divide decimals
N. Find percentages
T. Solve word problems—whole numbers
U. Solve word problems involving proper fractions

Each year students taking the State Student Achievement Test are tested on a select group of objectives in reading, writing and mathematics. In 1982, grade 10 students were tested on the objectives listed above.

Efforts Result in Increased Student Achievement

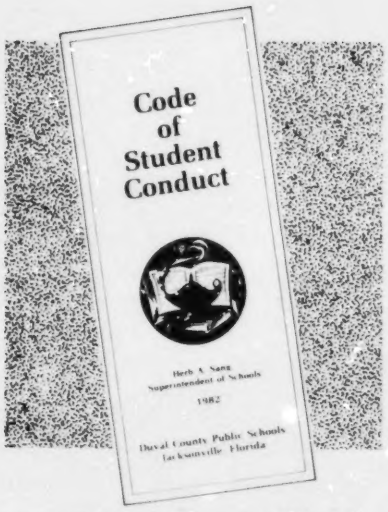
All teachers in the school became involved in preparing students for the test. Teachers volunteered to hold extra sessions of instruction in math after school and on weekends. Students voluntarily attended these sessions, working to increase their math skills. In addition, daily home room classes for juniors were dedicated to practice sessions with sample test questions devised by teachers. Homerooms competed against each other for the highest scores in these practice tests.

As a final method to assist students achieve higher scores on the SSAT, procedures for administration of the test were altered. In the first year the test was given, large groups of students took the test in the school auditorium. The second year, smaller groups of students took the test in classrooms, in familiar surroundings and with fewer distractions from fellow students.

The school's efforts to help students increase their scores on the SSAT were successful. That year, mathematics scores jumped from 20 percent passing to 69 percent passing, with increase in the communications portion of the test, as well. Ribault has continued to use these methods to encourage student achievement, and scores have continued to improve.

Other Measures Add to Achievement Gains

Ribault continues to encourage academic achievement while maintaining the school's focus on classroom learning and student activities. Discipline has been formalized through the adoption of the district-wide code of student conduct. Rules outlining acceptable behavior are defined, as are



Ribault students follow guidelines set in the district-wide *Code of Student Conduct*.

procedures for dealing with students who break rules. There is automatic expulsion, for example, for drug possession or use, violent crime or other serious offenses.

Attendance requirements are also specific: a student automatically fails all classes is there are more than nine unexcused absences during the grading period. Students who are unable or unwilling to abide by the conduct code or who are expelled go to the district alternative school for problem students.

Academic standards, too, have been formalized at the school. Each year district-developed Minimum Level Skills Tests are given to all Ribault students measuring the degree to which they have acquired the minimum skills necessary to receive credit in every course in the four academic areas of Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies. In order to receive credit in these classes, students must achieve a minimum of 75 percent correct answers to test items.

Remedial classes are available to students who have difficulty with course work or who are unable to pass the SSAT. Evening remedial sessions for groups of students are available on a voluntary basis, and volunteer teachers arrange to provide individual help during noon hours and on Saturday.

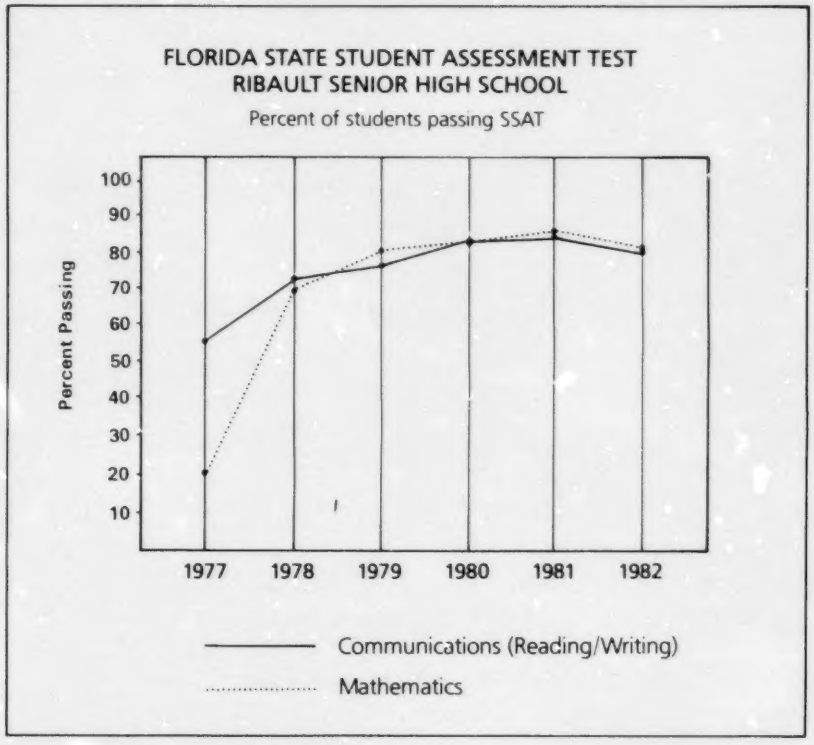
As students' capabilities have changed, course offerings have been altered to meet student needs. Far fewer introductory or "basic" mathematics courses are now necessary, for example. In the 1977-78 school year, there were enough students needing this course to require 24 sections of introductory mathematics: by 1982-83, that number dropped to six. At the same time, advanced mathematics class sections have increased from 12 to 16, including a new advanced calculus course. The school now offers advanced courses in other subject areas, too, which were not previously available.

The school has, in addition to changes in course work, adopted an innovative practice to increase student reading ability. In monitored ten-minute, in-class sessions each day, students all take time out from their schedules to read. Class-related or recreational reading are allowed but the time is designated and strictly used for reading. This special approach is designed to help students increase reading skills, thereby helping them improve their general academic achievement.

Academic Emphasis Effective

In the past six years, academic excellence has become a primary emphasis for Ribault High School students. The student code of conduct has reduced discipline problems, and refocusing on academic achievement has dramatically increased scores. Students are now highly involved in academics and respond to spirited academic competitions as enthusiastically as they do to sports events. The school now takes part in a districtwide "Brain Brawl" competition, where teams of students face teams from other high schools, trying to win competitions by demonstrating knowledge to accumulate high point scores. Team membership is considered an honor, and there is schoolwide support for the teams at well-attended inter-school meets.

As student interest in academics has grown, so has parent interest and involvement in school activities. Until



Scores for grade 11 Ribault students taking the Florida State Student Assessment Test increased dramatically between 1977 and 1981. Figures for 1982 show a drop, but the test was given that year to students in grade 10.

recently the school's annual parent open house was not well attended. In 1977, only 300 parents came to the evening function. Parent attendance has steadily increased since the institution of new practices at the school: in 1980, 1,125 parents attended, and this year over 80 percent took part in the open house.

Ribault has established standards for academic performance and for student behavior. Discipline problems have been reduced, attendance is much higher, the dropout rate has decreased, and the school has grown away from the campuswide problems of the 1970s. This change was accomplished with existing resources, as efforts were made to refocus the school to meet reordered priorities. With this change in approach, Ribault has helped students reach higher levels of achievement and introduced them to pride in academic excellence.

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